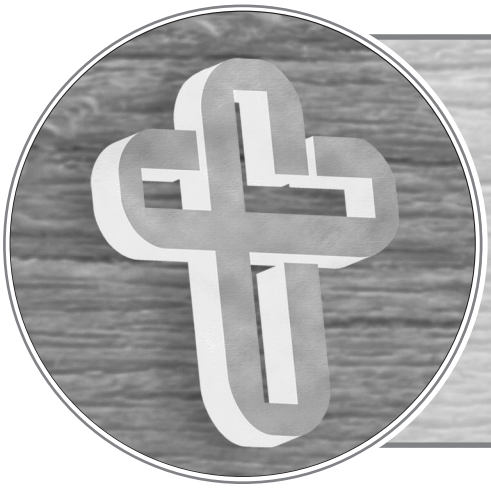


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
MAY 31 2025

not love at first sight

Scripture Story: Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2:14-22; Luke 5:27-39.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 28.
Key Text: Matthew 9:10, 11.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

In this story we will learn about accepting others even if at first we don't like what we see in these people. In Jesus' time tax collectors were hated. They were seen as dishonest and sinful because they were often corrupt. Yet Jesus went out of His way to seek their company. He would rather be in the midst of sinners than in a room filled with "just and noble" men. He knew that it was the *sinners* who needed His help rather than the righteous. As He said: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Matthew 9:12, NIV).

God wants us to accept all people. He doesn't want us to look at their appearance, reputation, or past. Let the students know that if God—who is Lord of the universe and who created all things—can forgive our sins, then surely we can accept others and seek to help them find salvation.

While we should guide our students to choose their friends wisely, we should also share with them the importance of seeking out the "sick." If we constantly befriend only those who are obviously "healthy," then how will we make a difference in the world? Jesus came into this world, not as a king, but as a man without a home. He came into this world as a man who ate with tax collectors and found His company among sinners. The Lord instructs us to accept all who come in need. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Realize the importance of accepting others, despite their appearances or pasts. (*Know)*
- Feel a desire to reach out and witness to those who need it most. (*Feel)*
- Find more opportunities to show all people God's love. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Unity in the Body of Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 14: "The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (Ps. 133:1; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; Col. 3:10-15.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Ask the class to imagine the following scenario. You are in church, and the following kinds of people arrive. Ask the class how they think they would respond if these people were to come in to church:

(1) a homeless drunk whose smell fills the entire room
(2) a famous musician
(3) the president of the United States
(4) Bill Gates
(5) someone dressed in the garb of a non-Christian religion, such as an Orthodox Jew, a Muslim, or a Hindu

Talk about your various responses and what they tell us about ourselves and our attitudes toward others. How well are we reflecting the character of Jesus?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

In the United States a group of Christian women have taken as their mission to witness to prostitutes in Las Vegas, invite them to church, and help them learn more about God's love. This group of Christians have already led many women out of that horrible way of life and into accepting Jesus. Their goal is to save as many people as possible. Even though some Christians think that they are immersing themselves among sinful people, they have not stopped. They know that the Lord wants them to bring as many people to Him as possible.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Many times when we see people who have bad reputations we try to keep our distance. We don't want to damage our reputation by associating with them, or we feel as if they are beneath us. Yet instead of looking at all the bad, we should look for their potential and try to see past their faults and be able to see them and help them seek out their true purpose in life. Jesus saw Levi and, instead of judging him and his faults, realized that this man had potential. He recognized that this man, too, could be in His kingdom.

Jeremiah 31:3 says: "The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.' "

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them:*

- What do you think initially angered the Pharisees in this story?
- Give a few reasons you think people hated the tax collectors so much.
- How do you think Levi felt when Jesus said, "Follow Me"?
- In this story Jesus said, "Who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before" (Matthew 9:16, NLT). What do you think He meant by that?
- What do you think Jesus saw when He first met Levi? What do you think His disciples saw?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: 1 Timothy 1:15; Ephesians 1:3-6; Genesis 4:7; John 15:16; 1:12; Matthew 11:28; Acts 10:35.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

During the time of Jesus ancient Israel was under the dominion of the powerful Roman Empire, which would tax all the provinces under its control. In ancient Israel a group of tax collectors was taken from the people themselves, who were contracted by Rome to collect taxes for the Romans. Their pay would be that they could keep a "fraction" or a percentage of the taxes they collected. Of course, this led to the potential for great abuse, for the more they collected, the more they got to keep.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Repetition

Repetition is a good teaching method. It is good to repeat yourself more than once in order for the point to be driven. However, don't repeat something too many times, or it may become tiresome. Think of different ways in which you can express the same point. This way it won't seem so monotonous. You can use analogies or activities as different methods in expressing this point.

For example, you could mention how a person may have committed an egregious sin and was judged their entire life for that one shortcoming. Ask them if they have experienced prejudice or judgmental behavior from others for something they have done in their past. One of the main things you could seek to reinforce in the students' minds is to abstain from using judgmental attributes in their day-to-day life.

These tax collectors were known to be crooks and cheats. Although there were some honorable exceptions, most weren't. This helps us understand the words found in Luke 3:12-14: "Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?'

"And he [Jesus] said to them, 'Collect no more than what is appointed for you.' " Jesus wasn't attacking them for being tax collectors; He was warning them about cheating the people from whom they were supposed to collect the taxes.

These tax collectors could become very rich, too. Some of them would actually petition the Roman government for the right to collect taxes and tolls from their own people. Then, having paid the government for this right, they were free to collect as much as they could, trying to milk every extra "dime" for themselves. Rome received a certain amount; the rest was theirs to keep for themselves.

Tax collectors gathered various taxes. The Roman Empire levied upon the Jews a land tax, a poll tax, even a tax for the function and operation of the Temple. There were different kinds of taxes for every territory. Some provinces, such as Galilee, were not under a Roman governor; thus, taxes remained in the province rather than going to Rome.

This helps us better understand how outraged some of the leaders and perhaps people were because Jesus would associate with these greedy tax collectors—who truly were working against the interests of their own nation. How low could you get! And yet Jesus loved them and wanted to save them. What a message for us!

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

III. CLOSING

Activity

Download from the Internet pictures of all sorts of people, from the rich and famous to the most unsavory, ugly, and unloving. Try to imagine their stories. How did they get the way that they are?

Now try to imagine how God, who knows all things, would view them. How different is God's view of them from ours? What should we learn from that difference?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

We all have seen people who appear to be unworthy of our acceptance. There have been cruel, heartless, insensitive, sinful, and arrogant individuals whom we have more than likely tried to avoid at all costs. Yet before we judge someone, we must first try to identify with them. Many people who outwardly seem unacceptable may have suffered in ways that we ourselves might never understand. But Jesus calls us to accept all individuals, even if we don't at first like what we see. He wants us to give all people a chance in showing them the road to eternal life. He wants us to help people know that no matter what their past has been, or no matter what horrible things they might have done, they still have a chance to find their true purpose; they still have a chance to come to the light of Jesus. We should never close the door to anyone, but demonstrate Jesus' love and acceptance through our unselfish love toward them.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*),* chapter 28.

*A special adaptation, *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2:14-22; Luke 5:27-39.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 28.

not love at first sight



Photo by Jennifer and Company

flashlight

"His whole life was a sacrifice of Himself for the saving of the world. Whether fasting in the wilderness of temptation or eating with the publicans at Matthew's feast, He was giving His life for the redemption of the lost. Not in idle mourning, in mere bodily humiliation and multitudinous sacrifices, is the true spirit of devotion manifested, but it is shown in the surrender of self in willing service to God and man" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 278).

keytext

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

(Matthew 9:10, 11, NIV)

what do you think?

In 2001 a huge money scandal involving a corporation was revealed. Many employees stole hundreds of millions of dollars while their victims lost all their money, their pensions, and sometimes even their homes.

How would you react if one of those employees who was guilty of destroying people's lives came to your church? Below are several options. List them from 1 being most likely, and 5 being the least likely, in how you would react if this were to happen. Remember to answer truthfully.

____ You would ignore the whole situation since what they did didn't affect you.

____ You would feel angry and keep your distance in fear that you might say something regrettable.

____ You would feel angry and say something without concern for their feelings.

____ You would show them a kind face, but keep your distance.

____ You would accept them and try to be a good witness to them. After all, they are in church, so they must want to change.

did you know?

In Jesus' time, tax collectors were hated by the Jews. But what was even worse was a Jew who became a tax collector. They were seen as traitors, and no one would accept them. Which is why, when Jesus accepted the tax collectors, so many of the Jews were unhappy. Even to this day tax collectors are shown in a bad light. Their job is to collect unpaid taxes from people as well as corporations. In many fictitious stories, they are portrayed as evil people, but in real life many people see them in the same light. After all, who really likes the IRS or its agents?

INTO THE STORY

"After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

"Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, 'Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'

"Then they said to Him, 'Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?'

"And He said to them, 'Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.'

"Then He spoke a parable to them: 'No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, "The old is better."'"

(Luke 5:27-39)



OUT OF THE STORY

Why do you think the Pharisees were so angry about Jesus accepting a tax collector?

_____
_____
_____

Why were tax collectors hated so much?

_____
_____
_____

Do you think Levi felt unworthy when Jesus said, "Follow Me"? Explain.

_____
_____
_____

Do you think Jesus worried about what others might think of Him befriending such unpopular folks as tax collectors? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old"?

_____
_____
_____

What do you think Jesus saw when He first met Levi?

_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister" **(Colossians 1:21-23, ESV).**

"Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" **(Psalm 139:16, ESV).**

"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart' " **(1 Samuel 16:7, ESV).**

"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" **(Romans 15:7, ESV).**

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" **(John 6:37, ESV).**

further insight

"When God's people are truly converted, when they realize the obligation resting on them to labor for those within their reach, when they leave no means untried to rescue sinners from the power of the enemy, the reproach will be removed from our churches."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 11

Sabbath

Read John 6:37.

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation" (Unity in the Body of Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 14). Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (John 6:37, ESV). Jesus sought out sinners and accepted them. He sought out people whom most of society hated. Instead of seeking to be at the home of a well-known or well-respected Jewish leader, He desired to be the guest of a sinner, someone deemed an outcast in society, so that He might give that person the hope of salvation.

Write down three ways in which we can follow Jesus' example in accepting others.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Sunday

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Have you ever felt unworthy of something? Have you ever done something to dishonor someone and, in return, been given mercy and forgiveness? Did you feel ashamed and filled with guilt? That may be how Levi felt. When Jesus accepted him, he must have felt unworthy when looking back on his life. Yet he probably also felt a great sense of joy in realizing that Jesus was willing to look past his many faults and accept him as a disciple. Use your Bible reading for today as an example and read through your Bible and try to find as many texts as you can about forgiveness and acceptance.Write down the three that you think are most important in your notebook or daily journal.

Monday

Read James 5:20.

Many of us seek to be with people of good reputation. But Jesus didn't. Often we pass by people who we think could be either bad influences or who seem to have bad pasts. But Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." He then says, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Luke 5:31, 32, NIV). While we should choose our friends carefully, if we neglect to seek out people who "need a doctor," how then will we be able to witness and spread Christ's love and hope? Throughout this next week, make an extra effort to follow Jesus' example and try to be a light to those who have seen only darkness. What is God's encouragement to us in today's Bible reading?

Tuesday

Read John 10:11.

In order to do God's will, we must surrender and die to self. Jesus' whole life was a sacrifice. To surrender to God, we must also be humbled. There may be people who we feel are "unworthy" of our attention. To remove these judgments and thoughts from our minds, we can pray and ask God for humbleness as well as the will to surrender completely to Him. Read through this story again and then read through *The Desire of Ages*, chapter 28. What does Jesus say about Himself in today's Bible reading? Are we expected to "lay down" our lives for others? What would that look like?

Wednesday

Read James 4:11, 12.

Rather than look on the outside of people, we must look into them and try to see their hearts and their inner beauty. Many times we pass judgment on people because of their outward appearance. But how can we truly know their hearts just by the outside? We all have flaws, but because of Jesus we can be saved despite the fact that we all sin. Read through some of the gospel this week in your daily devotions, and try to find more examples in the Bible of how Jesus accepted others whom many would see as sinful and unworthy.

Thursday

Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

In this day and age image is a very important part of our society. Image is talked about everywhere; whether you read about it in a magazine or see it on television, the media seems to want us to be more concerned about how our noses look or what new skin products work rather than refashioning our characters. What warning do we have in 1 Samuel 16:7 about focusing primarily or only on appearance? Pray today and ask God to help you look beyond other's faults or physical beauty and see their needs.

Friday

Read John 6:37.

In this life there will be many traps set for us. There will be many devices used against us to blur our judgment. But if we hold fast to Jesus, we will be able to overcome anything the enemy sends our way. Jesus wants us to share His love with anyone and everyone who will listen. We have been given a gift, not so that we can take it in vain, but so that we can show it to the world so they can be a part of God's kingdom. It doesn't matter where you've come from—you can claim the promise of eternal life in Jesus. Reflect on the words in today's Bible reading.

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 28.

* A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.